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FOR RIGHTEOUSNESS' SAKE

BY ANNE C. E. ALLINSON

"**BETRAYED** by false friends, reviled by enemies, the lot of the sincere pacifist is hard"—so such an one writes to me. "Every cause has its Gethsemane and this is ours. Does my suffering bring no conviction to you?" Thus am I asked again to accept a faith because its adherents are willing to be martyrs. The argument is a very old one and of continued efficacy. In great and little concerns alike the supporters of a cause welcome and its opponents regret the appearance of a victim. But today I find that the argument begets questions in my mind: What is the relation of the martyr to his faith? Is it his suffering or his belief which ensures ethical validity? Let us marshal our thoughts on this subject of martyrdom.

The appeal of the martyr is almost irresistible to those of us who count most fortunate in history the men and women who have been allowed to die for their faiths. Devotion to principle may, indeed, bring a fuller measure of life and honor; the exaltation of many to power and fame has been caused by their fidelity to ideas which transcend the world's emoluments. And yet about the final proof of fidelity, the laying down of life, there is a glory withheld from any other form of human service. Socrates without the hemlock, Joan of Arc without the flames—ah, how different might be our reading of their stories!

There seems to be in the race a strange instinct for martyrdom. The cynic sometimes seems not unjustified in attributing it to a desire for notoriety. But the desire for sacrifice is more primitive. When the philosopher Peregrinus had himself burned alive at one of the Olympic festivals, so that the crowds, collected from all over Greece, might fix their attention on him, he was sophisticated in comparison

with the rude votary of a savage religion offering his life as a sacrifice to the tribal God. We have come to associate the word martyr more specifically with Christianity because no other faith has produced martyrs in such profusion and because their blood has been the seed of a civilization within which we ourselves live and move and have our being. With these Christian martyrs, then, it may repay us to become more intimate.

Among them a primitive instinct was lifted into a passionate desire to share the sufferings of the author of their faith. The directness of this emotion seems utterly to have escaped Bernard Shaw in *Androcles and the Lion*. The play is a piece of amusing fooling with the Christian martyrs, who were ridiculous enough to their contemporaries and are here again served up to make an English holiday. In the one passage which injects dignity into the theme Mr. Shaw misreads his own fools. He makes Lavinia, better educated than the other prisoners, explain to the captain of the Roman guard that, in the face of death, all her faith in the Christian dreams and stories is oozing, fading away into nothing, and yet she means to die. The dialogue goes on:

"Captain: Are you, then, going to die for nothing?"

"Lavinia: Yes, that is the wonderful thing. It is since all the stories and dreams have gone that I have now no doubt that I must die for something greater than dreams or stories.

"Captain: But for what?"

"Lavinia: I don't know. If it were anything small enough to know, it would be too small to die for."

C'est magnifique—but it is not the truth. Shavians may consent to die only for something too abstract to know. But the Christians who faced the beasts in the Roman arena did it because they knew and loved Jesus Christ. Christianity, like every other religion, uses creeds and dogmas, even stories and dreams, to bulwark its existence. But when it was new-born into the mighty pagan world, only one of several religions which preached sacrifice and atonement, salvation and brotherhood, it had a single, unique instrument of victory: the personal love which its followers bore to a personal master who so exemplified his own preaching as to become their Way and Truth. If Androcles and his like had not been willing to die for a person, Mithras might have conquered Christ. An intense, impelling love for Jesus of Nazareth widened out from the little group of his life-time

disciples and flooded, at last, the shores of history. Since Jesus had been killed for his faith, his immediate followers passionately wished to die in the same way. Peter, especially, welcomed crucifixion, because in the hour of this torture he could obliterate the memory of that other hour, in the cowardly dawn, just before the cock crew, when he had denied his friend and master. Love like this spread to a group a little further away. Stephen, as the angry Jews in the synagogue surged toward him, looked up steadfastly into heaven and saw, not an Unknown, but Jesus, his Lord. When they cast him out of the city and stoned him, he died calling upon his Lord by name. In the crowd was a hostile young Jew, aiding and abetting the murderous attack. This same youth later—such is the drama of Christianity—by his dynamic personality and power of language spread far and wide the amazing emotion, the consuming love which had made Stephen's face like an angel's and which was to transform the pagan world. Paul endured dangers by land and sea, hunger and thirst and nakedness and buffeting, for the sake of preaching Christ crucified; and then welcomed execution outside the gates of Rome. In death he found at last a certain dwelling-place.

From Stephen and Paul the impulse to find joy in martyrdom rippled out to those obscurer men and women of the first few centuries who endured a violent death for love of one who had been crucified. "I have never suffered and now that I begin I begin to be a disciple of our Lord Jesus Christ"—so one Phileas, unknown to other fame, expressed himself when he was condemned to die. Old Bishop Pothinus of Lyons, so weak at ninety that he could scarcely draw breath, was renewed to strength by the "ardor of his soul and eager desire for martyrdom." Perpetua, the young matron of Carthage, facing her torture, remarked with a woman's sweet audacity, "I have always been gay, I shall be more gay in another world." From the authentic accounts—discarding the dreams and stories—of these martyrdoms might be constructed a series of dramas more picturesque than Mr. Shaw's. For example, in the story of Fructuosus, an early bishop of Rome, characters, scenes, homely details and great emotions lie at the playwright's hand. On a night in January the bishop is in bed, when he hears the footsteps of soldiers coming toward his room. He jumps up and meets them on the threshold, tranquilly receiving their an-

nouncement that he and his deacons are arrested. He only asks if he may take time to put on his shoes, and they tell him to suit himself about that. The next scene is in the trial room to which the criminals are brought from prison. There they are all condemned to be burned alive and Fructuosus "exults at the thought of the crown which is offered him." Next, the bishop and his deacons are taken to the amphitheatre through crowds of onlookers. The bishop is loved by all who know him, and so the pagans as well as the Christians shower pity upon him. But the Christians say less than the pagans, because, "thinking of the glory which awaits him, they are more inclined to joy than sadness." The drama culminates in the amphitheatre scene. As the victims begin to undress, Fructuosus' reader, with tears in his eyes, begs the privilege of taking off his shoes. But the bishop, "tranquil, joyous," says gently to him: "Go away, my child. I will take off my shoes myself." The fires are lit. The sacrifice is consummated. As a *finale* we are taken into a gathering of the faithful. They are sorrowful, uneasiness oppresses them all. "But they do not pity Fructuosus; on the contrary, they envy him."

With such a devotion impelling men and women of all kinds it is no wonder that in the first Christian centuries martyrdom threatened to run wild. Doubtless most modern intellectuals would have agreed with Marcus Aurelius in his contempt for Christian fanaticism. "The soul," he said, "should be ready at any moment to be separated from the body; but this readiness must come from a man's own calm judgment, not from mere obstinacy and with a tragic show as with the Christians." But in reality the early Church itself, to its infinite credit, insisted upon judgment and reasonableness, refusing to set its seal upon all kinds of martyrdom. A Christian, for instance, who was arrested and punished for wantonly destroying the "idols" of unoffending pagan neighbors was not a martyr but a criminal. Suffering in itself was not a sacrament. This was pointed out over and over by the leaders to the more ignorant. Once, during a plague in Carthage, some Christians lamented that they would have to die on sick-beds instead of as martyrs, and their bishop explained to them: "It is one thing for the spirit to be wanting for martyrdom and another for martyrdom to have been wanting for the spirit. For God does not ask for our blood, but for our faith."

Marcus Aurelius, on the throne of the Roman Empire and within the citadel of Stoic thought, was too remote from the religion of an obscure sect to understand its remarkable combination of emotion and reason. Before his time, in the period of our classical intimates, Trajan and Pliny and Tacitus, this union was revealed in a man of whom aristocrats and scholars may never have heard, but whose ideas were destined to spread farther and live longer than their own. Ignatius, the bishop of Antioch—said to be third in succession from Peter—was summoned to Rome to be killed by beasts in the amphitheatre. The Roman Christians started a movement to save him. Hearing of this he sent to them, from a stopping-place in his westward journey, an impassioned appeal to be permitted to be a martyr. The emotion in his letter rises like a flood: "Grant me nothing more than that I be poured out to God, while an altar is still ready. . . . God has vouchsafed that the bishop of Syria shall be found at the setting of the sun, having fetched him from the sun's rising. It is good to set to the world towards God that I may rise to him." But this emotion is merely a by-product of his profound conviction that through his death more efficaciously than through his life the truth will speak. Living, he will be but a cry; martyred, he will become a voice of God. The reason for this belief he gives in a superb sentence which would have been foolishness to the *intelligentsia* of the day, but which has been confirmed by two millennia: "Christianity is not the work of persuasiveness, but of greatness when it is hated by the world."

Doubtless without emotion the dictates of reason would far more rarely have been obeyed in this matter of martyrdom. At the behest of "calm judgment" enough blood would not have been spilled to nourish the roots of Christianity. The cool motive for sacrifice offered by the Stoics had but left the pagan world an eager seeker after any religion which would fill the place left void when reason retreated. Among all the Oriental faiths which promised salvation in spite of the defeat of man's will Christianity supplied the emotion of self-surrender to a Person who had died for others; and so won the case before the jury of human hearts. The persuasiveness of logic would not have kept this religion alive. To feed and nurture it greatness was repeatedly called upon to suffer. Its continued existence depended upon the same mysterious law as its birth.

We are brought back to the birth-pangs of the Christian martyr's faith. Here at Golgotha is the supreme martyrdom of the race. Now it is an amazing fact that before the cross of Jesus of Nazareth we find ourselves persuaded to thoughts which bear almost no resemblance to the thoughts of Peter and Stephen, Paul and Ignatius, Phileas and Perpetua. Here not even a Stoic could have found any tragic show. Here is neither obstinacy nor intense emotion. The founder of Christianity had no more irresistible leaning toward martyrdom than had Socrates, the pagan. And his physical recoil was greater, because he was young and full of life and faced bodily humiliation and suffering as well as death. The Athenian was seventy years old and doubtless had already relaxed his hold on life. He was to incur death—such was capital punishment in Athens—by a free act, without the outrage of personal violence. His martyrdom, for all the shame it heaped upon the law courts of his day, was in its details characteristic of the humaneness and the beautiful dignity of Athenian civilization. The prisoner and his friends had talked for hours about the soul's eternal life, and when the sun set and the hour of his bodily death arrived silence fell upon one of the immortal conversations of history. Then the jailor, reluctantly and respectfully, brought in the cup of poison. Socrates took it into his own hand, drained it, and lay down to die, without torment, in reverent peace. Contrast the fate of the Nazarene at the hands of Jews and Romans, scourged and buffeted, fainting under the heavy instrument of torture laid upon him, suffering from terrible thirst in the midst of agony, slowly dying before the jeering crowds! Those who came after him were sustained by the memory of his suffering and by the ardor of love which that suffering created. In the hour of martyrdom they "saw the glory of God and Jesus standing on the right hand of God." But for himself, upon the cross, there was the sense of having failed with men and been forsaken by God.

Nor was this hour of despair a reaction from exaltation. During the latter months of his life, as he foresaw the failure of his work and the enmity of the authorities, he dreaded the end to which devotion was leading him. The strength of the temptation to avoid it may be measured by the severity of his reproof to Peter—"Get thee behind me, Satan"—for suggesting the possibility of escape. When an alternative

seemed to present itself, his mind, as if not obstinately set on martyrdom, became troubled. This was when Andrew and Philip told him that some Greeks wanted to see him. There was probably reason for believing that they wished to invite him to go back to Greece with them; and Jesus had a swift thought of what it might mean to preach to such a people. Would it not, indeed, be better to flee Jerusalem and seek Athens, to live and win, rather than to die and lose? The account of his strange, disconnected answer to the disciples who ask if he will see the Greeks, must reproduce the perplexity of his spirit. "Now is my soul troubled," he exclaimed, "what shall I say? Father save me from this hour: but for this cause came I unto this hour." And yet "calm judgment" conquered. For he was assured of a truth which he poured out in burning words to Andrew and Philip: "Verily, verily I say unto you, except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die it abideth alone, but if it die it bringeth forth much fruit." Emotionally he dreaded crucifixion, but reasonably he believed that if he was lifted up he would draw all men unto him. None can deny that his judgment has been confirmed. No other martyrdom has generated such continuous results. No other seed buried in the ground has brought forth such abundant fruit. The mysterious law of creation received its sublimest confirmation at Golgotha.

Small wonder that with this mystery in possession of our consciousness we should sometimes forget to look beyond pain to the life which it brings forth. But the martyr of Golgotha did not forget. The generative power of suffering never obscured for him the supremacy of the truth for which he suffered. He judged the efficacy of the buried seed by the goodness of the fruit it was to bear. Blessed are they which are persecuted *for righteousness' sake*, was one of his sayings to the multitude. Indeed, our own rough and ready judgment of certain martyrs proves our unconscious agreement with this. If we really believed that martyrdom in itself ensured the crown, then it would make no difference to us whether Socrates died for the freedom or for the enslavement of human reason. And Saul of Tarsus, killed by a hot-head while he was breathing out threatenings and slaughter against the innocent, would have claimed our reverence as surely as Paul executed by the government for his acts of love and brotherhood. But this is not true. Our estimate

of both the pagan and the Christian involves an estimate of his cause. We revere the martyrdom of each because it was his final and most fructifying contribution to ideas which we accept as true.

By their fruits ye shall know them. This is a hard saying, for it sweeps away many defences. To mean well is not enough. Even to suffer is not enough. Because truth can be brought to birth only through suffering, we must not argue that everything born of suffering is truth. The terms are not convertible. Our sympathy inevitably goes out to the man who surrenders life or comfort or happiness for a belief. But sympathy must not mislead us into accepting his sacrifice as a proof of the truth of his belief, nor into absolving him, if he be in error. Ignorance is no excuse. The terrible responsibility is laid upon us to know the truth. This has been taught by all our spiritual masters. Socrates even identified virtue with knowledge. And the most piercing words in the New Testament are those which Jesus directed against the permanently self-deceived: "Not everyone that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven. . . . Depart from me, ye that work iniquity."

In these troubled times is it not necessary to bring ourselves back to this teaching, in all its severity? Suffering is rife in the world. We look to it for purification. But we must remember that its efficacy will depend upon the kind of life which fructifies from it. The warning is two-fold, touching both our judgment of others and our hope for ourselves.

We see our enemies suffering to the uttermost, offering themselves as willing martyrs for their faith. We may pay our tribute to their courage and devotion; but to dally with their faith, to be gentle with their doctrine is moral chaos. Those who choose to judge them by their suffering, rather than by the ideas for which they suffer, by their "Lord, Lord" rather than by the iniquity which they work cannot run to shelter behind Christianity. The Crucified bars the way.

But more swift and searching must be the application to ourselves. We long to bear our share of suffering at this time. The passion of thousands of Americans has been recently expressed in these beautiful words: "In a dull and blunted sense, we feel that longing the disciples felt when

they beheld the Master on the tree, and longed to hang there by his side. Our hearts and minds are sick with fever which only the letting of our blood may heal." But unless our blood is let for truth our sacrifice will be in vain. With our willingness to be martyrs let us join a scrutiny of our cause. Will our buried seed bring forth good fruit? If it be evil, we shall be hewn down and cast into the fire. But if by our dying we give life to freedom and to goodwill and to peace, then we shall become trees of righteousness, the planting of the Lord.

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